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ABSTRACT

This annual report shows the number and percentage of students retained in grade at the conclusion of the 1988-89 school year in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Statistical data were gathered from a principal's report, a student survey, and earlier reports. The following findings are presented: (1) in June of 1989, 30,413 students were retained; (2) the district retention rate rose from 4.95 percent in June 1988 to 5.09 percent in June 1989, the first increase since 1984; (3) the retention rates for both elementary and junior high school students are markedly lower than for senior high school students; (4) approximately 58 percent of the retainees in June 1989 were male; (5) retention rates for high school students were several times higher than for elementary or junior high school students; (6) the highest retention rate for elementary school students was in grade 1 (3.60 percent); (7) the highest retention rates for senior high school students were in grade 10 (26.39 percent) and grade 9 (24.95 percent); and (8) although the percentage of black students retained dropped from 6.07 percent in 1987 to 5.88 percent in 1989, these students had the highest retention rate of any ethnic/racial group. Statistical data are presented in two graphs. A copy of the LAUSD retention policy and five tables of statistical data are appended. (FMW)

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RETENTION PATTERNS IN THE LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT JUNE 1989

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PROGRAM EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT BRANCH

LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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RETENTION PATTERNS IN THE LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT JUNE 1989

PUBLICATION NO. 557

This Report Was Prepared By

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Program Evaluation and Assessment Branch
Los Angeles Unified School District

July 1990

LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Director
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Table of Contents

	Page
List of Tables in Appendix B	iv
List of Figures	iv
Executive Summary	v
Introduction	1
Procedure	1
Findings	2
Discussion and Recommendations	6
References	8
Appendix A: Retention Policy in LAUSD	9
Appendix B: Tables	13

List of Tables in Appendix B

Table		Page
B-1	Number and Percentage of Students Enrolled and Retained, by District Totals, 1979-80 Through 1988-89	14
B-2	Number and Percentage of Students Enrolled and Retained, by Region/Division and Sex, 1988-89	15
B-3	Percentage of Students Retained by Region/ Division and Ethnicity, June 1989	17
B-4	Number and Percentage of Students Enrolled and Retained, by Region/Division and Type of School, 1988-89	18
B-5	Summary of Retention, by Type of School and Grade, June 1989	20

List of Figures

Figure		Page
1	Percentage of Students Retained from June 1980 to June 1989 in the Los Angeles Unified District	3
2	Percentage of Students Retained in the LAUSD, by Level: 1982-89	5

RETENTION PATTERNS IN THE
LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
JUNE 1989

Executive Summary

Background

The Los Angeles Unified School District produces the annual Retention Patterns report to show the number and percentage of students retained in grade at the conclusion of the school term. This information is broken down by sex, grade, and ethnicity to suggest possible trends in retention patterns.

Data Collection Procedures

Retention data for this report were obtained from the Principal's School Report, Form 3, completed in October 1989. Enrollment data were obtained from the ethnicity survey of students, Form 7, completed in October 1988. Longitudinal comparisons were based upon information obtained from earlier Retention Patterns reports.

Summary of Findings

- In June of 1989, 30,413 LAUSD students were retained.
- The district retention rate rose from 4.95% to 5.09%--the first increase since 1984.
- The retention rates for both elementary and junior high school students are markedly lower than that for senior high schools.
- Approximately 58% of retainees in June 1989 were male.

- Retention rates for high school students (grades 9-12) were several times higher than for elementary (K-6) or junior high (6-9) students.
- The highest retention rate for elementary pupils was that for grade 1 (3.60%).
- At the senior high level, the highest retention rates were for grade 10 (26.39%) and grade 9 (24.95%).
- Although the percentage of Black students retained dropped from 6.07% in 1987 to 5.88% in 1989, these students had the highest retention rate.

Introduction

The annual report on retention in grades K-12 in the LAUSD is produced by the Program Evaluation and Assessment Branch. This report is based upon data from the Annual School Program Survey conducted each October, but does not include children's centers, adult schools, or occupational centers. The purpose of the study was to examine the retention patterns in the LAUSD. Data were presented from the district as a whole, as well as broken down by sex, ethnicity, and grade level. In addition, differences across years were studied for any longitudinal trends.

Retention is a placement option exercised when there is reasonable expectation that continued experience in the same grade will be best for the student. Recommendations for retention are to be based on continuous and thorough analysis of the student's personal and educational development, and the possible benefit derived from such retention. This policy is implemented by the local school administrative and teaching staffs in close consultation with the student's parents. For a description of the LAUSD retention policy, see Appendix A.

Procedure

Reports of students retained at the end of the 1988-89 school year were submitted by all schools in October 1989 as part of the annual fall survey. The survey's Form 3 provided retention data by grade, sex, and ethnicity for June 1989, whereas Form 7 from October 1988 supplied similar categories for enrollment data. Information from previous Retention Patterns reports was used for examining longitudinal trends.

Findings

The retention rate for June 1989 was 5.09% for the entire District. This marks the end to a downward trend which had begun in 1984 and continued through 1988 (Figure 1 and Table B-1--tables appear in Appendix B). During that period, the retention rate had dropped from 5.60% to 4.95%

Table B-2 presents enrollment and retention figures by sex of student and administrative region or division. The data indicate that males had a higher retention rate than females (this difference was observed for each administrative region or division). Districtwide, approximately 58% of the retainees in June 1989 were male.

Table B-3 outlines the percentage of students retained in each ethnic category across each administrative region or division. While specific enrollment and retention figures are not presented, the "percentage retained" rate represents the number of students in an ethnic category who were retained, relative to the total enrollment for that ethnic category. This manner of presenting the information facilitates comparisons within and between classifications. As an example, the retention rates across ethnic categories within the Senior High Schools Division are presented in the row "Senior High, Continuation, and Opportunity." The overall retention rate for students in this group is 18.26%. This average value, then, can be used as a baseline, for making ethnic group comparisons within the division. Such comparisons reveal Black and Hispanic students have higher than average retention rates (22.09% and 20.19%, respectively), whereas Asian and White students have lower than average retention rates (8.91% and

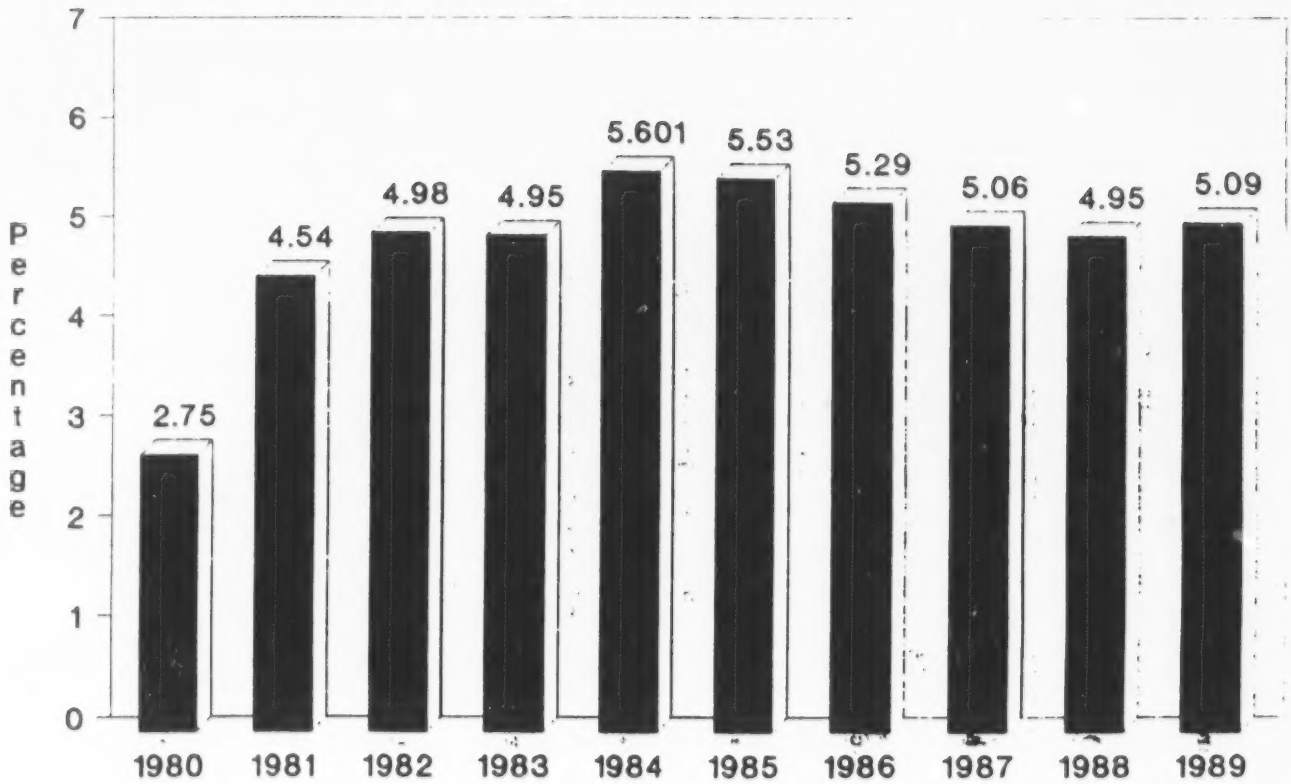

Figure 1. Percentage of students retained in the LAUSD, 1980-89.

13.46%, respectively). With few exceptions, these rates are somewhat consistent across regions for particular ethnic groups.

Table B-4 presents enrollment and retention rates by type of school and administrative region or division. Senior high schools had the highest retention rate overall (19.05%). Elementary schools had a higher retention rate than junior high schools (1.50% and 0.97%, respectively); these figures are quite similar to those of last year.

An interesting longitudinal trend is depicted in Figure 2. Since June 1982, the retention rate in senior high schools has climbed steadily from 12.76% to 19.05%. The rates for junior high schools and elementary schools, notably lower than that for senior high schools, have declined slowly, although steadily, over the past several years. Specifically, the retention rate for elementary schools has dropped from 3.19% to 1.50% since 1982; the junior high rate which was 2.02% in 1984, was 0.97% in 1989.

The enrollment and retention rates broken down by grade and type of school are presented in Table B-5. In elementary schools, 1st graders are retained at the highest rate (3.60%) while the rate for 6th graders is the lowest (0.26%). The highest retention rates among students in the senior high division are for grade 10 and grade 9 (26.39% and 24.95%, respectively). Junior high school 8th graders are retained at the very low rate of 1.01%.

While the retention rate for students in opportunity and continuation high schools might appear high (Table B-5), it may be artificially inflated because of missing students in certain enrollment counts. As noted previously, enrollment data are collected in October

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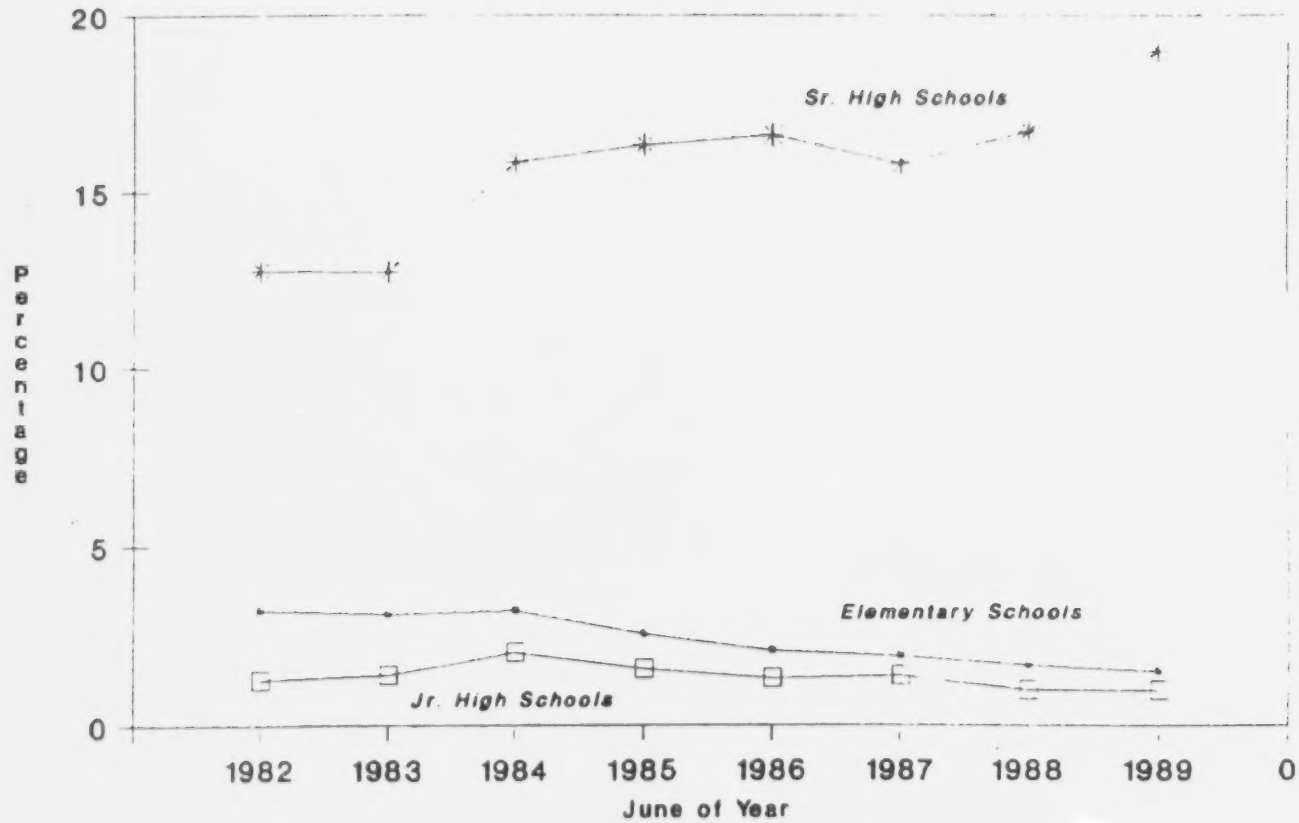

Figure 2. Percentage of students retained in the LAUSD, by level: 1982-1989.

of each year. However, some students who are included in the retention counts for the following June are not counted in the October enrollments because they enter school after the October norm day. Therefore, the retention rate for continuation and opportunity schools and centers may be artificially inflated, and therefore should be interpreted with appropriate caution.

Discussion and Recommendations

The data for June 1989, presented above, mark the end of a downward trend in the Districtwide retention rate which had started in 1984. However, a closer examination of the data reveals that the relatively low retention rates in elementary and junior high schools have continued to decline, whereas the much higher rate typical of senior high schools continued to rise. This is troubling because the downward trend in Districtwide retention rate observed over the last few years was primarily attributable to a drop in rate for elementary and junior high schools which masked a continued rise in senior high retention rate.

In light of the considerable discussion in the literature questioning the appropriateness and advisability of retention in grade (e.g., Kiner & Vik, 1989) and the soaring retention rate in District senior high schools, a closer analysis of this practice seems warranted. Some investigators have argued quite strongly that retention in grade does not produce any positive effects (e.g., Doyle, 1989), and others provide evidence that this practice actually has detrimental effects (Holmes & Matthews, 1984). Perhaps further suggestive of the need for additional analyses of retention data is the fact that in the

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LAUSD, retention is consistently and systematically related to ethnicity and sex of student, as well as to administrative region or division and grade level.

The decision to exercise the retention option results from a combination of factors. While many such factors are objective, others almost certainly are much less objective. It is also possible that the awareness of, and adherence to, the District's retention policy (Appendix A) varies significantly both between and within levels, regions and divisions. In any case, a detailed analysis of retention in LAUSD seems necessary, as well as a reconsideration of its educational utility.

References

Doyle, R.P. (1989). The resistance of conventional wisdom to research evidence: The case of retention in grade. Phi Delta Kappan, November 1989, 215-220.

Holmes, T.C., & Matthews, K.M. (1984). The effects of non-promotion on elementary and junior high school pupils: A meta-analysis. Review of Educational Research, 54, 225-236.

Kiner, R., & Vik, P. (1989). Student retention: Do principals use research findings? ERS Spectrum, 7(2), 9-12.

APPENDIX A

Retention Policy in LAUSD

Retention Policy In LAUSD

Roles/Responsibilities for Retention

Promotion or retention is based on a student's reasonable progress in meeting district standards of achievement (Reference: Bulletin No. 12, Promotion Policy--K-12, Office of Instruction, August 14, 1979; Bulletin No. 24, Reporting Students Progress in K-5 and K-6 Elementary Schools, April 15, 1986).

1. Responsibility for the individual's promotion to the next grade is a shared effort among administrator, teacher counselor/supportive staff, and parent. While the principal is responsible for the final decision regarding the promotion/retention of pupils in junior and senior high school, no decision to retain an elementary school student may be made without the prior written approval or consent of the student's parent or legal guardian.

2. In order to establish a definitive profile of the student's progress, certain records and appropriate documentation must be maintained.

   a. Teacher records must substantiate any recommendation.

   b. School organization data must substantiate alternatives or repeated opportunities for instruction.

   c. Cumulative files and attendance cards must indicate such items as performance test scores, progress, effort, and attendance.

   d. Dates of parent conferences must be noted.

3. The teacher is responsible for assigning the final mark and for recommending promotion or retention based upon assessment of reasonable progress.

4. Parent conferences shall be held as soon as it becomes evident that a student is not achieving or maintaining reasonable progress.

Retention at the Elementary Level

1. The decision to promote is based on evaluation of individual progress and ability to achieve the measures of reasonable progress. Pupil success at grades K, 1, and 2 is most important before promotion to the upper grades, where increasing instructional requirements and/or length of instructional day occur.

2. Retention at grade 6 is recommended only after other alternatives have been exhausted.

3. Beginning with the 1986-87 school year, no decision to retain an elementary student shall be made without the prior written approval or consent of the student's parent or legal guardian.

Retention at the Junior High Level

1. The retention policy at the junior high school level is developed at each school within the limits established by Board policy. Failure to complete one or more of the requirements below may result in retention of the student.

   a. success with the district's performance tests of essential skills.

   b. Success in the required and elective course content (or its equivalent) during any semester in grades 7-9, as measured by teacher evaluation.

   c. Progress in emotional, physical, and intellectual growth; exploration experiences; assimilation and application of skills; and socialization.

   d. Satisfactory completion of a course of study by achieving passing marks in courses representing at least 50 semester credits in the last 2 semesters. The completion of at least 4 semesters of attendance in a junior high school or its equivalent.

2. The principal of the junior high school may advance a failing pupil because of overage.

Retention at the Senior High Level

Policies governing promotion or retention of the senior high school student are determined by the number of credits earned within the framework of graduation requirements at the local school. Among the acceptable practices are the following:

1. A student is permitted to make up failures and other deficiencies in summer school in order to stay with his/her class. Although summer school classes carry credit, the student should make certain the credit will count toward graduation. Credit, for example, cannot be granted twice for the same subject as would be the case if a pupil repeated in order to improve a mark.

2. In exceptional cases, a student may be permitted to attend an adult school class in addition to day classes (Administrative Guide 2102).

3. A student who has been demoted is reinstated with the regular class as soon as the deficiencies have been made up. The counselor not only works with the student to help him/her improve, but also must solicit the cooperation of the parents. This may be done by letter, phone call, or conference.

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Appendix B

Tables

Table B-1

Number and Percentage of Students Enrolled and Retained, by District Totals, 1979-80 Through 1988-89

School year	Enrolled October	Retained June	Percentage retained
1979-80	547,469	15,082	2.75
1980-81	539,646	24,524	4.54
1981-82	540,803	26,947	4.98
1982-83	549,198	27,168	4.95
1983-84	556,047	31,161	5.60
1984-85	565,189	31,233	5.53
1985-86	578,962	30,638	5.29
1986-87	588,642	29,786	5.06
1987-88	590,064	29,205	4.95
1988-89	597,375	30,413	5.09

Note. Enrollment figures are based on the final report of each October's ethnic survey. They include all regular elementary and secondary schools, magnet schools and programs, alternative schools, opportunity schools, continuation schools, and special education schools. Retention figures are based on the principals' reports from the annual survey each October, providing totals for the previous June.

Table B-2

Number and Percentage of Students Enrolled and Retained, by Region/Division, and Sex, 1988-89

Region/ division	Sex	Enrolled October 1988	Retained June 1989	Percentage retained
A	Male	26,318	488	1.85
	Female	24,248	289	1.19
	Total	50,566	777	1.54
B	Male	32,195	548	1.70
	Female	31,023	292	0.94
	Total	63,218	840	1.33
C	Male	29,772	450	1.51
	Female	28,544	274	0.96
	Total	58,316	724	1.24
D	Male	29,268	362	1.24
	Female	27,865	213	0.76
	Total	57,133	575	1.01
E	Male	31,614	681	2.15
	Female	29,755	421	1.41
	Total	61,369	1,102	1.80
F	Male	34,443	526	1.53
	Female	32,044	348	1.09
	Total	66,487	874	1.31
G	Male	27,993	308	1.10
	Female	27,068	229	0.85
	Total	55,061	537	0.98
H	Male	27,464	450	1.64
	Female	25,911	325	1.25
	Total	53,375	775	1.45
A-H	Male	239,067	3,813	1.59
	Female	226,458	2,391	1.06
	Total	465,525	6,204	1.33

Table B-2 (continued)

Region/ division	Sex	Enrolled October 1988	Retained June 1989	Percentage retained
Senior high	Male	65,296	13,869	21.24
	Female	61,791	10,338	16.73
	Total	127,087	24,207	19.05
Special education	Male	2,653	1	0.04
	Female	2,110	1	0.05
	Total	4,735	2	0.04
District	Male	307,016	17,682	5.76
	Female	290,359	12,729	4.38
	Total	597,375	30,413	5.09

Note. Enrollment figures are based on October 1988 ethnic survey. They include all regular elementary and secondary schools, magnet schools and programs, alternative schools, opportunity schools, continuation schools, and special education schools. Retention figures are based on the principals' report from the annual survey, October 1989. Senior high division includes the comprehensive high schools, and magnet, continuation, and opportunity high schools.

Table B-3

Percentage of Students Retained, by Region/Division and Ethnicity, June 1989

Region/ division	Percentage retained, by ethnicity							
	Amer. Indian/ AK Native	Asian	Black	Filipino	Pacific Islander	Hispanic	White	Total
A	0.00	0.19	1.30	0.34	1.29	1.95	1.43	1.53
B	0.00	1.30	1.83	0.00	1.41	1.25	1.35	1.32
C	0.00	0.00	1.51	1.04	1.61	1.04	0.30	1.22
D	0.00	0.16	1.13	0.73	0.00	1.47	0.62	1.11
E	1.19	0.77	1.85	1.04	0.49	2.22	1.16	1.72
F	0.00	0.24	0.90	0.00	0.47	1.62	0.94	1.28
G	0.00	1.27	2.14	0.00	0.00	0.96	0.24	0.98
H	0.89	0.69	1.77	0.24	0.00	1.67	0.94	1.45
A-H total	0.24	0.66	1.50	0.41	0.83	1.72	1.24	1.33
Senior high div.	24.53	8.91	22.09	10.63	17.42	20.19	13.46	18.26
Special ed. div.	0.00	0.00	0.18	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.04
District total	7.70	2.99	5.88	3.05	4.46	5.21	4.29	5.03

Note. Percentage retained represents June 1989 retention figure divided by October 1988 enrollment. Enrollment figures are based on the October 1988 ethnic survey. They include all regular elementary and secondary schools, magnet schools and programs, alternative schools, opportunity schools, continuation schools and special education. Retention figures for June 1989 are based on the principals' report from the annual survey, October 1989. Senior high division includes the comprehensive high schools, and magnet, continuation, and opportunity high schools.

Table B-4

Number and Percentage of Students Enrolled and Retained, by Region/Division and Type of School, 1988-89

Region/ division	Type of school	Enrolled October 1988	Retained June 1989	Percentage retained
A	Elementary	34,825	540	1.55
	Jr. high	13,205	209	1.58
	Magnet	2,536	28	1.10
	Total	50,566	777	1.54
B	Elementary	46,514	775	1.67
	Jr. high	16,253	64	0.39
	Magnet	451	1	0.22
	Total	63,218	840	1.33
C	Elementary	44,585	367	0.82
	Jr. high	11,988	343	2.86
	Magnet	1,743	14	0.80
	Total	58,316	724	1.24
D	Elementary	35,540	435	1.22
	Jr. high	14,584	87	0.60
	Magnet	7,009	53	0.76
	Total	57,133	575	1.01
E	Elementary	40,582	804	1.98
	Jr. high	17,570	263	1.50
	Magnet	3,217	35	1.09
	Total	61,369	1,102	1.80
F	Elementary	44,306	730	1.65
	Jr. high	18,192	133	0.73
	Magnet	3,989	11	0.28
	Total	66,487	874	1.31
G	Elementary	41,254	525	1.27
	Jr. high	13,166	12	0.09
	Magnet	641	0	0.00
	Total	55,061	537	0.98

Table B-4 (continued)

Region/ division	Type of school	Enrolled October 1988	Retained June 1989	Percentage retained
H	Elementary	40,289	749	1.86
	Jr. high	12,553	25	0.20
	Magnet	533	1	0.19
	Total	53,375	775	1.45
A - H	Elementary	327,895	4,925	1.50
	Jr. high	117,511	1,138	0.97
	Magnet	20,119	143	0.71
	Total	465,525	6,204	1.33
Senior high	Senior HS	114,698	22,257	19.40
	Opportunity	1,595	263	16.49
	Continuation	3,288	1,318	40.09
	Magnet	7,506	369	4.92
	Total	127,087	24,207	19.05
Special education	Special ed.	4,763	2	0.04
District	Total	597,375	30,413	5.09

Note. Enrollment figures are based on the October 1988 ethnic survey. They include all regular elementary and secondary schools, magnet schools and programs, alternative schools, opportunity schools, continuation schools, and special education schools. Retention figures for June 1989 are based on the principals' report from the annual survey, October 1989.

Table B-5

Summary of Retention, by Type of School and Grade, June 1989

Type of school	Grade	Enrolled October 1988	Retained June 1989	Percentage retained
Elementary	K	47,214	805	1.71
	1	51,913	1,869	3.60
	2	49,199	1,029	2.09
	3	46,890	573	1.22
	4	44,419	351	0.79
	5	42,487	211	0.50
	6	33,083	87	0.26
	Total	315,205	4,925	1.56
Junior high	6	8,802	14	0.16
	7	39,946	413	1.03
	8	38,549	391	1.01
	9	26,806	318	1.19
	Total	114,103	1,136	1.00
Senior high	7	284	0	0.00
	8	298	0	0.00
	9	13,505	3,370	24.95
	10	45,409	11,984	26.39
	11	31,182	4,419	14.17
	12	24,020	2,484	10.34
	Total	114,698	22,257	19.40
Magnet schools/ centers/ programs	K	544	5	0.92
	1	1,197	47	3.93
	2	1,421	19	1.34
	3	1,484	14	0.94
	4	2,102	14	0.67
	5	2,226	5	0.22
	6	2,354	5	0.21
	7	2,725	1	0.04
	8	2,635	1	0.04
	9	2,935	64	2.18
	10	3,137	174	5.55
	11	2,648	90	3.40
	12	2,167	73	3.37
	Total	27,575	512	1.86

Table 5 (continued)

Type of school	Grade	Enrolled October 1988	Retained June 1989	Percentage retained
Opportunity & continuation	6	2	0	0.00
	7	27	3	11.11
	8	130	12	9.23
	9	1,100	319	29.00
	10	2,529	734	29.02
	11	1,672	337	20.16
	12	1,516	176	11.61
	Total	6,976	1,581	22.66
Special ed.	Total	4,763	2	0.04
District	K-12	583,320	30,413	5.21

Note. Enrollment figures are based on the October 1988 ethnic survey. They include all regular elementary and secondary schools, magnet schools and programs, alternative schools, opportunity schools, continuation schools, and special education schools. Data were excluded when grade of student was not known. Retention figures for June 1989 are based on the principals' report from the annual survey, October 1989.

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